

Viaduct Revisited

If everything was going great, we probably couldn't stand it. If you need some bad news to feel normal, just think about the continued failure by our elected leadership to agree on a funding plan for transportation. If you want an illustration of how bad things are, think about this: we have now talked about rebuilding the Alaskan Way Viaduct for longer than it took to build it in the first place.

However, in keeping with our sunny mood, we choose to look back on the happier time when it was actually possible to build a Viaduct at a cost of a whopping \$8 million. Of course, with adequate reinforcement for earthquakes, it probably would have cost \$8.5 million, which is just about \$3,991,500,000 less than it will cost to rebuild it today.



Blessed Silence

Is it just us or does it seem like it's been weeks, maybe even months, without any news arising from the Seattle City Council chambers about strippers, stripper-related parking lots, Big Al Rosellini, Eastern Washington dams, circus animals or the moral complexities that attach themselves to Trident nuclear-attack submarines?

The biggest election shakeup in City Council history is one obvious reason for the more business like mood, but some credit also goes to new City Council President Jan Drago, a low-profile, largely unsung council veteran who set a more business-like agenda for her colleagues at the first of the year. Drago also brings something to City Hall that's almost unheard-of in recent times: day-to-day experience as a business owner. You know ... making payroll, feeling a little woozy when the fire department or L&I stops by for a little chat, that kind of thing.



Jan Drago

Capital Industries

Bad news struck Capital Industries in the Georgetown business community on January 18 when a fire destroyed the company's largest manufacturing plant, but even that catastrophe had its upside. Within hours neighbors were offering to help. Within days the company was back in operation. Within two weeks, Capital co-owner Ron Taylor was sitting in the front row at the "state of the city" speech by Mayor Greg Nickels as the mayor promised several new efforts to help make Seattle a better home for Capital and other industrial businesses.

The Mayor will be announcing his improvement plan later this spring. It's easy to be skeptical, but let's hope for the best. Look for follow-up coverage in the summer issue of Seattle Industry.

It all goes to show that you never know when something good is going to happen. And if anyone tells you industry is dead in Seattle, offer to serve them up a batch of pollock eggs.



Ron Taylor and
Deputy Mayor Tim Ceis

Seattle Looks Up As Council Simmers Down

'Judy Cam' era fades to black

Jan Drago owned Haagen Dazs ice cream stores for 11 years. At one point, she owned four of them. In that time, every two weeks, 26 times each year, she faced "payroll," that awesome, awful, dreaded and/or delightful time when the help gets paid and the boss makes sure the checks don't bounce.

Drago estimates that in her experience as a store owner, she faced payroll nearly 300 times. It wasn't always easy. Sometimes, she didn't have enough money to pay herself. Winters in particular can be poor seasons for ice cream stores. But every time Jan Drago had a payroll to make, she made it. Even if she didn't get paid, everyone else did. Not once did one of Drago's paychecks bounce.

Not since pharmacist George Benson served as council president more than 15 years ago has someone with such extensive retail business experience served as the head of the City Council. Other council leaders have had private business and professional experiences outside government. That's not the same as running your own business and taking care of employees. Drago thinks it is a crucial distinction.

"There is a real difference," she says, "between running a business and being responsible for other people, and having a business where you are pretty much responsible just for yourself. No doubt about it."

And like mom coming home after the teenagers threw a wild weekend, Drago seems to have helped tidy things up considerably on the council and also quiet things down.

Only six months ago, the city council was reeling from a controversy perfectly captured by its popular name, "Strippergate," which involved a topless dance club in Lake

City and its oh-so-pedestrian desire for a better parking lot. Only in Seattle could such elements converge into such a brouhaha and in Seattle, Stripper-gate provided a tassle-twirling climax to a succession of self-inflicted controversies that over the past half-decade turned the council into cannon fodder for Jay Leno monologues, editorialists and right-wing shock-jocks all across the continental United States.

There were council controversies over circus animal safety, controversies over the desire of some councilmembers to tear down the eastern Washington hyrodams, controversies over the proper role of Trident submarines in Seafair. Then there was the council effort to pass a resolution supporting US troops in Iraq. The measure was debated for so long and so earnestly it prompted an Idaho newspaper to ask, "Can't we just give Seattle to France?"

These episodes actually didn't come along that often, and didn't really last that long, but once they made the newspapers, they were hard to forget.

Today things are, blissfully boring, which is just the way things ought to be.

The City Council is putting all of us to sleep, which is precisely what a city council should do.

To get a clearer idea of the change in times, mood and background music, maybe it would help to crank up the old "Judy Cam."

It is tremendously unfair, to single out just one council-member in an effort to capture the past image problem the group earned collectively. Then again, life itself is often



unfair. In examining the issue of council image there is actually no better starting place than the space formerly occupied by City Councilmember Judy Nicastro and her all-illuminating "Judy Cam."

The Judy Cam actually never existed. It was just an idea advanced by Nicastro who announced in the news media that she wanted to create a web cam that would track her movements 24/7 so the public could hop on the internet and ... well, do what exactly? See what a great job she was doing? This part of the Judy Cam concept was never too clear.

Then there was the Nicastro photo that appeared on the City Council web site. In it, half her face was shaded and she peered out at the curious web site visitor looking ... well, looking like what exactly? Sultry? Shady? Was she some kind of female Austin Powers, a political agent provocateur, an international woman of mystery?

Then there was the announcement after she had concluded her first year in office that she was ready to run for mayor. Then there were her running battles with the mayor.

Then there was a Seattle Times newspaper column in January 2003 which seemed sum it all up perfectly. It was a good natured piece that portrayed Nicastro as a feisty,

The Council was lucky to have someone with payroll experience when the political bills came due.

colorful character. The following quotes from the column directly: Ms. Nicastro was someone “as comfortable on a pub crawl as at a fancy-pants dinner. She can discuss city policy in her schoolmarm glasses and, in the next breath, make reference to her ‘fat ass.’”

There is something about combining such concepts as “pub crawl,” “fancy-pants,” “schoolmarm glasses,” and the term “fat ass” that can inspire a reader to want to learn more.

An exhaustive search by Seattle Industry concluded quite conclusively that this column was the first news media account in the entire history of the City of Seattle in which a member of the Seattle City Council and the term “fat ass” appeared at the same time.

You can go as far back as the Mercer Girls, Chief Sealath and Princess Angeline, and there was nothing even comparable.

And the downside (or backside) was, the Councilmember Nicastro issues were not simply ones of style. Consider this.

In 2002, Long Painting pulled up stakes and fled the City of Seattle for the City of Kent, taking with it 500 good, “family-wage” jobs along with a whole lot of tax revenue that had flowed for years to the Seattle Public Schools and Seattle City Hall.

The primary reason Long Painting pulled up stakes was an ugly controversy over an environmental complaint against the company that later proved unfounded. Nicastro and her staff helped lead the council charge against Long Painting.

At the time Long left, it was enough to make you wonder just where the City Council and the City of Seattle were headed. The city’s business climate was, and is, challenging enough even without misinformed interventions by city councilmembers.

On the sociological front, one longtime civic observer offered the opinion in print that Nicastro represented an evolution, a changing of the civic guard, the emergence of a city councilmember who was perceived like a “rock star.”

Thank goodness, “sinking rock” was more like it.

Last November, after becoming mired in the high-profile controversy over “Strippergate” she was turned out of office along with two other incumbents. After the dust settled, three new councilmembers took their place, and the new council majority elected Drago as their leader.

Drago’s two-year leadership term began in January. Even before she officially assumed that role, Drago quietly made the rounds with civic groups seeking their views on how the council could work more effectively. She was seen at these meetings actually taking notes.

She also reached out to suburban city officials long put-off by Seattle’s hyper-liberal political culture.

In her first few weeks as council president, the council conducted a round of community meetings so members could mingle with the citizenry. Drago even organized and completed a priority setting process that enabled councilmembers to establish collective goals out of their personal objectives and desires...

Then came confirmation hearings for new City Light Director Jorge Carrasco. They were splendidly boring. Then came time to adopt a new, revised, reduced city budget. The “compassion crowd” squawked, but

the budget sailed through. Afterwards, councilmembers and the Mayor “made nice” and even talked about how wonderful it was to work together to solve such important problems.

City Hall news crews must be kicking each other just to stay awake.

Drago is in her tenth year on the council and she brings a perspective that goes back farther than that. While she owned her ice cream stores, she was also a community activist who became involved in issues involving public safety, gun control and the homeless.

Her activities sometimes took her to Olympia where she found herself welcome on both sides of the aisle. Democrats knew her from her activities in that party. Republicans saw her business card, recognized her as a business owner and were happy to talk with her.

After winning her seat on the City Council, Drago went back to Olympia on lobbying efforts and learned how dramatically the reception had changed. Democrats were still friendly, but many Republicans lost interest in talking with her because they don’t feel a Seattle City Councilmember is much worth talking to. “Democrats from Seattle aren’t always held in high esteem,” she said.

One of her personal goals is to help the City Council reach out to those who lost faith in the institution. The Council was lucky to have someone with payroll experience when the political bills came due. ♦



Former City Council Member Judy Nicastro

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Seattle Industry

A New Voice for the Industrial Core



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